

Portraits of soldiers lost



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: Boy Scouts Shane Van Winkle, left, and Sam Lyman of Troop 654 out of Zayante place a flag on the grave of Francis Xavier Barron, a casualty of World War II. The Scouts were giving veterans a helping hand placing flags at Santa Cruz Memorial Park.

BELOW: World War II U.S. Navy veteran Bob Lemmon walks through Santa Cruz Memorial Park, making sure the grave of every veteran has an American flag.

Bio-Collective Santa Cruz has always answered her country's call to service

By **KURTIS ALEXANDER, ROBYN MOORMEISTER and EMILY SINGER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

Santa Cruz is not a place that eagerly sends its young to war.

But over the past 150 years, beginning with the Civil War, more than 25,000 Santa Cruz County residents have gone off to fight with the nation's armed forces.

About 300 never returned.

In the deadliest incident, at least six county residents with Company C of the 194th tank battalion, a unit from Watsonville and Salinas, were killed in an offensive against Japanese forces in the Philippines during World War II.

Others went down in plane accidents, submarine collisions and after contracting fatal diseases in the five longest wars of the past century-and-a-half.

No known Santa Cruz County deaths resulted from either of the more recent Persian Gulf wars.

The following profiles briefly describe a few of the residents who lost their lives in military service.

Regardless of their battle, the success of their mission or the popularity of their cause, the deaths of these residents came at

great cost to their families, leaving memories, some of which survive to this day.

James Monroe Hecox, 1835-1863

James Hecox was one of 23 county residents counted among the Civil War's 600,000 dead, according to the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History archives.

Like many California recruits, Hecox was assigned to a Union Army unit that patrolled the West and never saw the intense fighting that characterized countless battles on the East Coast.

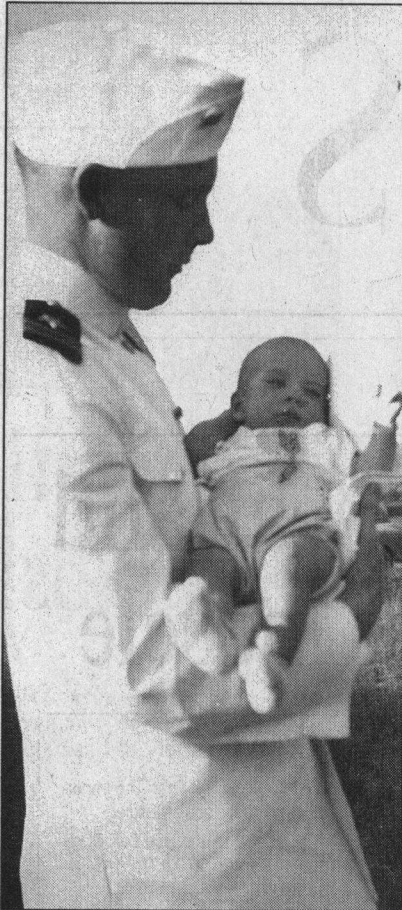
Hecox enrolled at age 25 as a private in Company L of the 2nd California Cavalry on Sept. 11, 1861, one year before President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Hecox and his fellow Santa Cruz recruits were initially stationed at a temporary service camp along the east bank of the San Lorenzo River near River Street in Santa Cruz.

The company was sent to the now-defunct Camp Alert in San Francisco, where they



See **PORTRAITS** on **BACK PAGE**



Submitted photo

Patrick O'Leary holds his newly-adopted daughter Rose Hellier-Dabbs six months after rescuing her during World War II. O'Leary later was killed when a suicide plane hit his ship in the Pacific, leaving his young wife Edna in Aptos to care for the baby.

Portraits

Continued from Page A1

contributed to the defense of the San Francisco Bay. At the time, the bay was ringed with military forts, including Fort Point, Fort Baker and Fort Alcatraz, for fear Confederate forces might invade California for its riches, according to National Park Service historians.

Orders later came for Company L to move out of the San Francisco Bay Area, which brought Hecox and his fellow cavalymen to posts in Utah and Nevada.

An 1863 article in the Sentinel quotes a Company L commander who describes a military pursuit of "Indians" into the mountains of Nevada, which resulted in the surrender of 1,200 men.

Hecox's unit, though, never engaged Confederate soldiers.

In May 1863, Hecox was sent home from an assignment working as a blacksmith along the Owens River in Inyo County after contracting Rocky Mountain spotted fever, a disease transmitted by ticks.

He died of the disease in Santa Cruz on July 20, 1863, according to museum records.

Hecox was the son of James and Ida Hecox. He was the nephew of well-known Santa Cruz lighthouse keeper Adna Hecox.

Thomas Roy Evans, 1893-1918

The community was shaken when Thomas Roy Evans, a Santa Cruz High School football star, died serving his country in World War I.

Three years after he left his coveted position as captain of the football team, Evans enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and went to war in 1917. He was 23 years old.

Evans was one of at least 50 men from Santa Cruz County who died serving in the first world war.

The 1914 Santa Cruz High School Tri-dent yearbook describes Evans as "tall, handsome and good-natured" and as a "combination of football player and actor, and very well he has maintained both roles."

His high school football picture shows him sitting in the middle of his teammates, the only one wearing his letterman sweater, his high school principal and coach flanking him at each side.

His classmates called him "Bob," a name he preferred over his first and middle names.

He died when his plane crashed into the Bay of Colon in Panama on Aug. 9, 1918, 13 months after he enlisted. The cause of the accident was not detailed in the local media.

"He was dauntless in courage," a Sentinel reporter wrote after Evans' funeral, where six high school football players were pall bearers. "Hot tears rained from the eyes of his countless friends."

Patrick O'Leary, 1918-1945

It was a long, hard ocean journey from France to Santa Cruz in 1943 for a week-old war orphan on a U.S. Navy ship, but the orphan lived to tell her story thanks to an American Navy lieutenant with a big heart.

Rose Errin O'Leary of Santa Cruz — now Rose Hellier-Dabbs — grew up hearing stories about her father, Patrick O'Leary, the American who saved her life before he was killed in action in World War II.

Out of all the wars Americans have fought, the second world war claimed the most lives from Santa Cruz County, with 214 documented deaths.

O'Leary burned to death when a Japanese kamikaze suicide plane hit his ship, the USS Birmingham, on May 4, 1945.

He was 27 years old when he died, leaving his young wife Edna in Aptos to care for Dabbs.

Dabbs was born to a Jewish family hiding from the Spanish government in Vichy, France. O'Leary took her in after the French underground smuggled her in a shoe box by fishing boat to the USS Birmingham, according to Dabbs.

"(O'Leary) was on duty at the time, and he gave the OK to take me," said Dabbs, now 60. "He took me right away and said, 'I'll keep her.'"

He wrapped the newborn in a Navy-issue blanket and when the ship stopped off in California, before heading east, he and his wife in Aptos adopted her.

Dabbs proudly shows pictures of O'Leary cradling her while his ship was docked in California: O'Leary smiles down at his adopted daughter, holding her as if he was afraid of breaking her.

Dabbs doesn't remember O'Leary, but her mother told her all about him: "He was an exceptional person," Dabbs said. "He was a good man."

Frank Gfroerer, 1931-1952

On Nov. 14, 1952 — with U.S. forces two years into their campaign to oust invading North Korea from South Korea — a U.S. C-119 went down in a mountainous area outside of Seoul, United Press reported.

Forty-four U.S. servicemen were killed in the crash, thought to be accidental and heralded as the deadliest accident since the war's start. Among the casualties was 21-year-old Watsonville native Frank Gfroerer.

A varsity catcher on the baseball team, Gfroerer enlisted in the Army in June 1951 shortly after graduating high school in Watsonville. He was part of an engineering corps that left for Korea that November.

One year later, a Japanese reporter was the first journalist to describe the accident scene where Gfroerer lay dead. She described wreckage scattered beneath the 2,000-foot Mount Yebong, where the plane had crashed.

"As I walked through the wreckage, I found Christmas presents that the men had bought on (rest and rehabilitation) in Japan," the reporter wrote.

The twin-engine plane was carrying servicemen back to Korea after a five-day leave from the battlefield.

Gfroerer's Watsonville family was expecting the soldier home for Christmas, according to an obituary in the Pajaronian.

Instead, parents Mr. and Mrs. Emmett Gfroerer, three sisters and a brother received word of Gfroerer's death via a defense department telegram six weeks before the holiday.

Vincent Locatelli, 1945-1965

In November 1965, 20-year-old Vincent Locatelli, of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division, landed in the central highlands of South Vietnam, according to fellow platoon member Lt. Col. Harold Moore.

The unit spent its first few weeks fighting Viet Cong soldiers in the battle of Ia Drang, often considered the first major battle of the decade-long war.

On Nov. 17, Locatelli's unit was ambushed. As the young soldier tried to pull his wounded sergeant from the field, he was killed by an enemy grenade, according to his brother John Locatelli, who lives in Santa Cruz today.

The soldier was one month away from the end of his tour of duty.

Locatelli was one of 47 Santa Cruz residents killed in the Vietnam War.

His brother John, 61, remembers his younger brother as a "special, unique person."

"He gave away all his possessions before he left," John said. "He gave me

his gun and my brother his tent. ... I still wonder why."

Locatelli, who was engaged when he left for Vietnam, also had his fiancée return all of the engagement presents before he left.

His fiancée later became a nun, according to Locatelli's brother Sal, who also lives in Santa Cruz today.

In addition to Sal and John, Locatelli is survived by brother John of Santa Cruz, sister Angela Inman of Bak-ersfield and numerous other family members who still live in the area.

The soldier and the battle in which he died are memorialized in the book "We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young" written by Lt. Col. Moore.

Contact Kurtis Alexander at kalexander@santa-cruz.com. Contact Robyn Moormeister at rmoormeister@santa-cruz.com. Contact Emily Singer at esinger@santa-cruz.com.

Memorial Day events

TODAY

6 A.M. Avenue of Flags along Freedom Boulevard, from the VFW Hall to Pioneer Cemetery, by Freedom Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 1716. Weather permitting.

6 A.M. Avenue of Flags at the Mount Carmel Cemetery, Aptos, by Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 10110.

7 A.M. Avenue of Flags, Santa Cruz Memorial Park, 1927 Ocean St., Santa Cruz, by Santa Cruz Elks Lodge 824. 423-8240.

8 A.M. Avenue of Flags at Holy Cross Cemetery, 2271 7th Ave., by Tres Pueblos Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7362 and Boy Scout Troop 633, Santa Cruz. Weather permitting.

9:20 A.M. Flag-raising ceremony with bugler and rifle salutes. Veterans Memorial Building, Front Street, downtown Santa Cruz, by Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 1716.

9:40 A.M. Flag-raising ceremony with bugler and rifle salutes. Veterans Memorial Park, 1927 Ocean St., Santa Cruz, by Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 1716.

10 A.M. A traditional Memorial Day service at Evergreen Cemetery, Grand Army of the Republic plot, near Harvey West Park. Includes a presentation by Santa Cruz Mayor Emily Reilly of a proclamation honoring deceased veterans, a musical tribute by Anzar High School senior Stephanie Smith, and a reading of the Gettysburg Address by Scotts Valley High School junior John Morgan. Call 476-6795.

11 A.M. Barbecue for the public. Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building, Front Street, downtown Santa Cruz. Donations accepted.

11 A.M. Barbecue for Elks Lodge No. 824 members and guests. 150 Jewell St., Santa Cruz. Swimming pool and hot dogs start at 11 a.m., barbecue lunch at 1 p.m.

1-4 P.M. Barbecue for the public. Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7263, 2259 7th Ave., Santa Cruz. Cost: \$8.